

**STATEMENT OF A. DURAND JONES, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 2656, A BILL TO ESTABLISH A NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE QUINCENTENNIAL OF THE DISCOVERY OF FLORIDA BY PONCE DE LEON.**

**SEPTEMBER 21, 2004**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 2656, a bill that would establish a commission to commemorate the quincentennial of the discovery of Florida by Ponce de Leon.

The Department supports S. 2656 if amended as outlined in our testimony. We believe that establishment of the commission would help ensure that the lasting legacy of the discovery and colonization of Florida is understood and appreciated by all Americans.

S. 2656 would establish a Discovery of Florida Quincentennial Commemoration Commission to encourage, coordinate, and conduct the commemoration of the quincentennial and to ensure that the anniversary will have lasting educational value.

Specifically, the bill would establish a Commission composed of 12 members who are Presidentially appointed and have demonstrated a strong sense of public service and expertise that will contribute to the duties of the Commission. The duties of the commission would include conducting a study regarding the feasibility of creating a National Heritage Area or National Monument to commemorate the discovery of Florida, planning and developing

activities appropriate to commemorate the Quincentennial, consulting with and encouraging appropriate governmental entities as-well-as elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, foreign governments, and private organizations to organize and participate in Quincentennial activities, and coordinating activities throughout the United States and internationally that relate to the history and influence of the discovery of Florida. The Commission would terminate on December 31, 2013.

As S.2656 suggests, Juan Ponce de Leon, arriving in 1513, was likely the first European to set foot in what is now Florida, near present-day St. Augustine. Ponce de Leon's quest for the fountain of youth has become an established legend that has also drawn fame and recognition to Florida and the United States.

Spanish explorers and conquistadors who followed Ponce de Leon sought gold and other treasures, glory, and fame, like those who had previously made such discoveries in Mexico and Peru. Only in the New World was there the opportunity for quick advancement in diplomatic and Spanish military careers. Others came to advance the cause of the Inquisition, to convert all non-believers in the New World.

Historians generally believe that Ponce de Leon landed at or near the present location of the City of St. Augustine. Spanish heritage is still reflected in local architecture and historic resources and attractions in the center of the old part of the city. The Castillo de San Marcos National Monument contains arguably one of the oldest and most important historic structures in the State

and the nation. It is prominently located on the Matanzas River directly across the road from the Spanish Quarter of St. Augustine. These aspects of St. Augustine's heritage combine to make it the ideal location for the offices of the Commission.

The Department suggests several clarifying amendments for S. 2656. We recommend that if a feasibility study is conducted, as specified in Section 5(a)(1) of the bill, that the bill amended to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct the study, rather than the Commission, in accordance with generally accepted practices for suitability and feasibility studies, to determine what, if any, type of unit would be appropriate to commemorate the discovery of Florida within the National Park System. In addition to examining whether a unit of the National Park System would be appropriate, such a study would also examine other alternatives for a federal role, including whether designation of a National Heritage Area should be considered.

Also, while S. 2656 is quite specific in requiring the Commission to consult with and encourage participation in the commemoration by governmental agencies, educational institutions, foreign governments, and private organizations, we note that it is silent with regard to consultation with and involvement of the Indian tribes of Florida, particularly the Seminole and Miccosukee tribes. The Department suggests that Section 5(a)(3) of the bill be amended to require the Commission to consult with Indian tribes in Florida, as well as with foreign governments and State and local governments.

We recommend that Section 4(c)(3) be deleted due to concerns that the Department of Justice

has raised regarding the constitutional authority of this provision of the bill. We will be happy to work with the Committee as well as the Department of Justice and the Department of State in order to find appropriate ways to involve the Government of Spain in activities regarding the Commission.

Finally, S. 2656 authorizes appropriations that are necessary for each fiscal year from 2005 to 2013. We recommend that \$250,000 a year be authorized for this effort given other competing priorities and the need to focus federal funds on our parks and other essential programs.

Our suggested amendments are attached to this testimony.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or any members of the subcommittee might have.

## **Proposed Amendments**

### **S. 2656 – Quincentennial of the Discovery of Florida**

On page 5, line 1, strike paragraph (3) and renumber the following paragraph 4 as 3.

On page 6, line 18, strike “(1) conduct a study regarding the feasibility of creating a National Heritage Area or National Monument to commemorate the discovery of Florida;”, and renumber the following paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 as 1, 2, and 3.

On page 7, line 6, insert “tribal governments,” after “governments,”.

On page 16, line 14, strike all of subsection (a) and insert the following new subsection; “(a) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subsection (b) there is authorized to be appropriated to carry out the purposes of this Act \$250,000 for each of fiscal years 2005 through 2013.”

On page 16, following line 23, insert the following new section;

“SEC. 10. STUDY.—

The Secretary of the Interior shall—

(1) conduct a study regarding the suitability and feasibility of commemorating the discovery of Florida with a unit within the National Park System in accordance with Section 8(c) of Public Law 91-383 (16 U.S.C. 1a-59(c)); and

(2) submit a report to Congress that describes the findings of the study and any conclusions and recommendations of the Secretary not later than 3 years after the date on which funds are made available to carry out the study.”